

Message Text

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PAGE 01 CANBER 03744 01 OF 02 160707Z

ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-02 INR-10

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-02 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-20

ACDA-12 NASA-02 OES-07 OC-06 CCO-00 EB-08 /112 W

-----110058 160717Z /13

P 160229Z MAY 78

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3275

SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

INFO CINCPAC PRIORITY

COMNAVTELCOM PRIORITY

CNO PRIORITY

DCA WASHDC PRIORITY

DCA PAC HONOLULU PRIORITY

NAVCOMMSTA HAROLD E HOLT PRIORITY

AMCONSUL BRISBANE PRIORITY

AMCONSUL MELBOURNE PRIORITY

AMCONSUL PERTH PRIORITY

AMCONSUL SYDNEY PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 1 OF 2 CANBERRA 3744

DEPARTMENT FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY HOLBROOKE

OSD/ISA FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY ABRAMOWITZ

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: MARR, PEPR, AS

SUBJ: PUBLIC DEBATE ABOUT SATELLITE GROUND TERMINAL
AT NORTH WEST CAPE

1. SINCE THE PUBLIC DEBATE OVER US INTENTIONS WITH RESPECT
TO A POSSIBLE SECOND-GENERATION SATELLITE GROUND TERMINAL
AT THE NORTH WEST CAPE JOINT NAVAL COMMUNICATIONS STATION
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CONTINUES, I HAVE JUST SENT THE FOLLOWING LETTER TO
AUSTRALIAN DEFENSE MINISTER KILLEN, PER CONVERSATION THIS
MORNING WITH ASSISTANT SECRETARY HOLBROOKE I HAVE TOLD KILLEN
HE IS FREE TO USE IT AS HE WISHES. THE AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC
DEBATE IS CLEARLY POLITICALLY MOTIVATED, AND I DO NOT PROPOSE
TO GET FURTHER INVOLVED IN IT EXCEPT TO MAKE SURE THAT OUR
GOOD FAITH IS NOT SERIOUSLY CHALLENGED.

2. BEGIN TEXT:

"DEAR JIM:

"DURING THE PAST SEVERAL DAYS I HAVE WATCHED WITH INCREASING DISMAY AS THE PUBLIC DISCUSSION OVER A POSSIBLE NEWER SATELLITE GROUND TERMINAL AT THE JOINT AUSTRALIAN-US NAVAL COMMUNICATIONS STATION IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA HAS UNFOLDED AMID CHARGES OF US DUPLICITY AND BAD FAITH. REGRETTABLY, THIS BEGAN AS BOTH THIS EMBASSY AND I WERE PREOCCUPIED WITH ENSURING THE SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF VISITS TO AUSTRALIA BY VICE PRESIDENT MONDALE, CHIP AND CARON CARTER, AND THE CRUISER USS OKLAHOMA CITY WITH THE COMMANDER OF THE US NAVY'S SEVENTH FLEET.

"BUT I BELIEVE IT IS INCUMBENT UPON ME TO AT LEAST ENSURE THAT YOU AND YOUR COLLEAGUES -- PARTICULARLY THE PRIME MINISTER AND ANDREW PEACOCK -- ARE AWARE OF OUR VIEWS INSOFAR AS THE QUESTION OF GOOD FAITH IS CONCERNED. AS I THINK YOU KNOW, BOTH THIS EMBASSY AND I HAVE GONE TO CONSIDERABLE LENGTHS THIS PAST YEAR (YESTERDAY MARKED THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF MY ARRIVAL IN CANBERRA) TO IMPROVE THE FLOW OF INFORMATION BETWEEN OUR TWO GOVERNMENTS, AND I AM CONFIDENT THAT WE HAVE SUCCEEDED. FOR THAT REASON, SOME OF THE CHARGES THAT HAVE APPEARED IN PUBLIC IN RECENT DAYS TROUBLE ME DEEPLY.

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"TO SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT, LET ME OFFER THE FOLLOWING:

"-- YOUR STATEMENT IN PARLIAMENT ON THURSDAY, MAY 11 WAS BOTH ACCURATE AND COMMENDABLE. IT WAS ALSO COMPLETE.

"-- THE SATELLITE GROUND TERMINAL WHICH IS CURRENTLY AT NORTH WEST CAPE REPLACES THE ONE (AND IS SIMILAR TO IT) WHICH WAS MOVED IN 1973 TO DIEGO GARCIA TO HELP RESTORE COMMUNICATIONS WHICH HAD BEEN DISRUPTED BY A CYCLONE. THIS IS AN AN/TSC-54 UNIT, AN EARLY MODEL SATELLITE GROUND TERMINAL. IT SUPPLEMENTS LAND LINES THROUGH CARNARVON WHICH ARE CURRENTLY IN USE.

"-- THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE HAS, OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS, FUNDED RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF SATELLITE GROUND TERMINALS, THE AN/MSC-61 SERIES. THE AN/MSC-61 SYSTEM IS MORE MODERN, LARGER, AND IS OTHERWISE TECHNOLOGICALLY IMPROVED.

"-- IN DUE COURSE, IT CAN BE EXPECTED THAT MSC-61 UNITS WILL PROBABLY REPLACE ALL TSC-54 UNITS IN DOZENS OF WORLDWIDE

LOCATIONS. THAT INCLUDES NORTH WEST CAPE. FUNDING FOR COMPLETION OF THIS SYSTEM HAS NOT YET BEEN APPROVED BY CONGRESS AND IT WAS TESTIMONY ON BEHALF OF THAT SYSTEM WHICH I ASSUME LED TO THE CURRENT BROUHAHA IN THE FIRST PLACE.

-- BUT THIS NEXT GENERATION EQUIPMENT DOES NOT ALTER ITS FUNCTION AND PURPOSE ANY MORE THAN INSTALLATION OF PUSH-BUTTON TELEPHONES ALTERS A BASIC TELEPHONE SYSTEM. AND ITS EVENTUAL USE AT NORTH WEST CAPE REPRESENTS NO MORE OF A CHANGE THAN THE INTRODUCTION OF ELECTRIC TYPEWRITERS TO REPLACE MANUAL ONES, OR OF MOVING-ELEMENT SELECTRIC TYPEWRITERS TO REPLACE ORDINARY ELECTRIC ONES.

-- WITH RESPECT TO QUESTIONS OF WHETHER AUSTRALIAN
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AUTHORITIES WERE AWARE OF THE EVENTUAL REPLACEMENT OF THE AN/MSC-61 EQUIPMENT, I CAN ASSURE YOU THAT THEY WERE -- AT THE TECHNICAL, WORKING LEVEL, WHERE THAT SORT OF OPERATIONAL INFORMATION SHOULD PROPERLY BE DEALT WITH.

-- I FAIL TO SEE WHY THE REPLACEMENT OF OBSOLESCEENT EQUIPMENT SHOULD HAVE TO ESCALATE TO THE POLICY LEVEL OF FORMAN GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT EXCHANGES SIMPLY BECAUSE SOME JOURNALIST HAS SCoured THE -- LITERALLY -- HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF PAGES OF CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY COVERING THE US BUDGET PROCESS IN THE HOPES OF FINDING SOMETHING TO TITILLATE THE POPULAR IMAGINATION OR EMBARRASS OUR TWO GOVERNMENTS.

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-02 INR-10 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-02 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-20 ACDA-12
NASA-02 OES-07 OC-06 CCO-00 EB-08 /112 W
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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3276

SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
INFO CINCPAC PRIORITY
COMNAVTELCOM PRIORITY
CNO PRIORITY
DCA WASHDC PRIORITY
DCA PAC HONOLULU PRIORITY
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AMCONSUL BRISBANE PRIORITY
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DEPARTMENT FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY HOLBROOKE

OSD/ISA FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY ABRAMOWITZ

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

"-- WITH RESPECT TO OUR FORMAL UNDERTAKING TO CONSULT THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT (UNDER PARAGRAPH 9(2) OF THE "LAND USE AGREEMENT") WITH RESPECT TO POSSIBLE NEW CONSTRUCTION AT NORTH WEST CAPE TO HOUSE THE NEWER MSC-61 EQUIPMENT, I CAN ASSURE YOU THAT THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT WILL BE CONSULTED AT THE APPROPRIATE TIME. THAT TIME IS NOT YET UPON US, HOWEVER, SINCE WE HAVE NEITHER THE NEW EQUIPMENT NOR THE MONEY TO GO AHEAD WITH SUCH CONSTRUCTION, AND WE DO NOT EXPECT TO UNCLASSIFIED

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HAVE EITHER FOR SOME YEARS TO COME. SUFFICE IT TO SAY THAT NO CONSTRUCTION CONTRACTS HAVE BEEN AWARDED, EVEN THOUGH WE ARE STUDYING WHERE, HOW, AND AT WHAT COST THE MSC-61 SYSTEM MIGHT EVENTUALLY BE INSTALLED AT NORTH WEST CAPE.

"-- FINALLY, A BRIEF COMMENT ABOUT ENGAGING POLICY LEVELS ON SUCH A MATTER. I HAVE HEARD OF YOUR ANALOGY ABOUT THE BUILDER WHO, ALTHOUGH HE HAS NOT YET APPLIED FOR A BUILDING PERMIT, HAS NONETHELESS LET CONTRACTS FOR FURNISHINGS AND CEMENTING, ETC. I WOULD PREFER THE ANALOGY, IN THIS CASE, OF THE SUBSTITUTION OF ELECTRIC TYPEWRITERS FOR MANNUAL ONES. I SIMPLY DO NOT BELIEVE THAT -- AS A PRACTICAL MATTER -- EITHER OF US COULD FIND ANYONE IN "POLITICALLY AUTHORITATIVE QUARTERS"" -- CERTAINLY NOT IN WASHINGTON -- WHO WOULD AGREE THAT THE REPLACEMENT OF OBSOLESCEENT EQUIPMENT WITH MORE MODERN EQUIPMENT (BUT EQUIPMENT WHICH IS SIMILAR IN FUNCTION AND PURPOSE) IS A MATTER WHICH SHOULD ENGAGE THEIR ATTENTION. THIS IS AN ISSUE WHICH CONCERNS ENGINEERS AND BUDGET ANALYSTS.

"IN SUM, I BELIEVE THE CURRENT AFFAIR HAS PERHAPS EXCEEDED

RATIONAL BOUNDS. THE NUMBER OF TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS WITH APPLICATIONS TO OUR JOINT DEFENSE FACILITIES (FROM ELECTRIC STAPLERS AND TYPEWRITERS TO MORE MODERN TRANSMITTERS AND SATELLITES) VASTLY -- AND I MEAN THAT QUITE LITERALLY -- EXCEEDS THE CAPACITY OF OUR TWO GOVERNMENTS' POLICY LEVELS TO DEBATE EACH AND EVERY ONE OF THEM. IF WE TRIED, WE WOULD VERY QUICKLY BE SWAMPED. I WOULD LIKE TO PROPOSE THAT WE VIEW THE CURRENT EXAMPLE FOR JUST WHAT IT IS -- A JOURNALISTIC EFFORT TO MAKE A SENSATIONAL NEWS STORY, REplete WITH CHARGES OF DUPLICITY AND BAD FAITH BETWEEN TWO FIRM FREINDS AND ALLIES, OUT OF A CONSIDERABLY LESS SINISTER TECHNOLOGICAL IMPROVMENT IN EXISTING EQUIPMENT THE PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS OF WHICH BOTH OF OUR GOVERNMENTS ARE AGREED UPON.

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"I REGRET THAT I HAVE WRITTEN OVER-LONG ABOUT THIS, BUT I HOPE THAT PERHAPS WE CAN PUT SOME OF THE MORE SENSATIONAL CHARGES THAT HAVE APPEARED IN THE MEDIA BEHIND US AND FOCUS INSTEAD ON THE MORE IMPORTANT MATTERS THAT COVER YOUR AND MY DESKS. I HOPE YOU WILL SHARE THESE VIEWS WITH YOUR COLLEAGUES, PARTICULARLY THE PRIME MINISTER AND ANDREW PEACOCK. NEEDLESS TO SAY, IF THERE IS ANYTHING I CAN DO TO HELP PUT THIS ONE TO REST, YOU HAVE A WILLING ACCOMPLICE.

"SINCERELY, PHILIP H. ALSTON, JR., AMERICAN AMBASSADOR"
END TEXT.

3. JUST AS THIS CABLE WAS BEING DISPATCHED, WE RECEIVED STATE 123567 (DTG: 152220Z MAY 78 GIVING THE ANSWERS SECDEF (ISA) GAVE THE AUSTRALIANS IN WASHINGTON. BEAUTIFUL MESSAGE; IT TIES PERFECTLY THE INFORMATION CONTAINED IN AMBASSADOR'S LETTER ABOVE. WE BELIEVE THIS SHOULD END THE MATTER.
ALSTON

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Message Attributes

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Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 16 may 1978
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Decaption Note:
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Disposition Comment:
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Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
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